

The Christian

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News-Letter

Edited by
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THERE IS MORE TO BE SAID about the recent conference of Christian Youth held at Oslo in July, to which brief reference was made in the last number of the News-Letter.

These 1,500 delegates were all young people (the upper age limit was thirty). Only a small minority had ever been outside their own countries before. But they were not gathered together just as "youth", but as Christian youth, that is, as members of one or other branch of an institution nearly 2,000 years old. They all came with a strong sense of being delegates and of being privileged persons, the objects of the outpouring by their Churches of a good deal of money and labour. The organizational work was done for them, but the steering of the conference lay in the hands of a committee of delegates, and the real significance of the conference was given to it by those of the delegates who were most acutely aware of the tension of being *young*, children of their time, brought up in nations engaged in bitter conflicts, and of being *old*, committed to a Gospel and a Church rooted in history and regarded by many of their contemporaries as a dying survival of a dead past. One does not need to overtax the imagination to think that such a gathering might in years to come help to influence the history of the Church in ways now unforeseeable.

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ORDINARY HOME LIFE

BY

M. L. HARFORD

TWO COMMENTS ON OSLO

Our best plan is perhaps to let two of those who were present at Oslo speak of it themselves. The first is an Englishwoman who bore some responsibility in the day to day running of the conference. The second is a young French delegate, writing in a French newspaper for French readers.

The Englishwoman writes :—

“The keynote of Oslo was struck by Dr. Visser’t Hooft in his opening address on the first night, when he said : ‘Everything depends on our realization that this is not a conference about our Lord, but the conference of the Lord, which is meant to be His work, His creation.’ We felt we had come not to discuss Christ, but to meet Him.

“But there was a certain danger in pitching the claim of the conference so high. What would Christ say and how would He say it ? It was not surprising that in a conference of delegates all under thirty expectation took a direct and sometimes naive form. There was a good deal of talk about an Oslo message, and some, I think, almost expected this to come like fire direct from heaven. There was no message of this kind. There was given to us no world-shaking word to take home. Instead, we spent the last day in open plenary sessions which to many were flat and disappointing, but which had the great merit of leaving us with a sober, truthful impression—one of limited, immature thinking, of naive attitudes to great problems, and yet of a deep sincerity of purpose in the intention to discover what the lordship of Christ meant in every realm of life.

“The first message of Oslo lay in Oslo itself. Many of us were familiar with the idea of the world Church and with certain facts about organization and mechanism, but the plain simple truth that *the world Church consists of people*—people who acknowledge the same allegiance to one Lord—does not really dawn until some of these people really meet in the flesh. This multitude gathered together was not one of races or parties, but of persons—of individuals with clashing viewpoints, colourful vitality and strong wills.

If you think of the Church as an organization it seems comparatively easy to oil the wheels just sufficiently to make the machine go, but if you see it as a teeming multitude of individuals, each springing hot from his own social and political environment, you are led to ask: Can *any* power subdue these proud wills into one unity? Then the majesty of the Lordship of Christ over men becomes clear.

“Perhaps this was a realization which the westerner, living in what has been called a ‘post-Christian’ age, needed especially. There is apt to be in our minds a little lurking snake of doubt: Are the ‘triumphs of the Cross’ really being recorded still? Or are we just going on with Christianity because we are used to it and have a vested interest in it? It is from the ‘younger Churches’ that our faith is given back to us. Jesus Christ *is* the same, yesterday, to-day and for ever—the seeker and the subduer of men. The triumphs of His Cross to-day are *new* ones. But there was no question of an ageing western cult receiving back life from its young converts: this World Church is the *new* creation of Christ Jesus in this age; it is neither eastern nor western but His alone. This was what Oslo said most plainly.

“At bottom, I think, the whole conference turned on the question what is obedience to Jesus Christ? It was easy to proclaim in all the languages of the world that Jesus Christ is Lord; comparatively easy, too, to analyse the problems of some area of life and then pretend to open doors through all the dilemmas with the magic key: *Jesus Christ is Lord*. The discussion groups soon realized that this was no true solution at all. *How* were we to work out the lordship of Christ in all the concrete situations of life? Had we a clear set of rules to be applied? Could we expect to receive in a moment of illumination ready-made directions? Was Oslo going to give us some kind of all-purposes formula? Such questions underlay much of the Bible study discussion, making it one of the most fruitful experiences in the conference, constantly tying up in the most vital way with the discussion-themes on present-day areas of life. And the reason why the Bible study was so living was precisely

because delegates were beginning to see that to learn obedience was to seek to put on, slowly and painfully, the mind of Christ Jesus."

Here is an extract from the article by the Frenchman :—

" At the opening session, when it was revealed that 81 per cent of the delegates had chosen English as the general language, we (the French delegation) instinctively pressed our elbows to our sides to prevent ourselves from being swept away. By heroic effort we met together early every morning to get our instructions from our senior delegates . . . and to fish up those unfortunates among our members who were drowning in commissions which did not translate for us. We had some very fruitful discussions with the Czechs, to whom we had to say again, after ten years, how ashamed we were of the betrayal at Munich ; . . . with the Americans to discuss some of the spiritual temptations pertaining to the possibilities of the Marshall plan ; . . . with the Germans to draw out from them the positive meaning of their declaration of guilt at Stuttgart ; and lastly with the Latins to compare notes on religious liberty in a country with a Catholic majority.

" When we came we thought that the international part of our debate would be dominated by the exchanges between America and Russia, and that nowadays the essential thing for a young Christian was to take up some position on this matter which would deliver him from fear. But whether it was because the Russian world was almost absent from the conference, or because the leading delegates among the young Americans had learned to be aware of the temptations of their country's power, or whether it was because Asia, swept by a passion for independence, posed problems more immediate than those which weary and dismembered Europe could articulate—the question for which we prepared ourselves did not dominate Oslo. But as soon as we arrived the Dutch and Indonesian delegates landed us in the problem of war, and we ourselves had also to give an account of ourselves on a question for which we had not been prepared, our colonial problem. We got out a statement which

was given to all the Asiatic and African delegations, and, more important than the statement, the conviction was brought home to us that we had not hitherto kept a sufficient watch on this question, but had allowed the misery of the war at our gates to obscure its tragic presence.

"We thought that the 'message of Oslo' addressed by Christian youth to the world in the same summer as sees the festival of democratic youth at Prague would be a great message of the young confessing Church, raised up and sustained by Jesus Christ in the midst of the sufferings and confusions of actual experience. . . . Oslo leaves us all a prey to perplexity. The Holy Spirit won't obey the voice of numbers (nor for that matter the voice of solitude either); He gives Himself to him who begs. . . . But just at the point where we lacked a clear programme, there, we found ourselves possessed of two things—repentance and courage.

"What a sight it was to see for ourselves that in all corners of the earth there are men seeking the same obedience and trying to show forth in the face of the world's disorder, Christ Incarnate."

THE GERMAN HILFSWERK

Many readers expressed their interest in the account we gave in News-Letter No. 288 of the German Hilfswerk, which is organizing relief and reconstruction throughout the Churches in Germany. We have received a letter from Dr. Gerstenmaier, who is primarily responsible for the direction of the Hilfswerk, in which he says that he and his colleagues keenly appreciate the interest taken by Christians elsewhere in what they are trying to do in Germany. The News-Letter account has been republished in America. Dr. Gerstenmaier sends us at the same time copies of a news sheet which the Hilfswerk is circulating throughout Germany, giving news both of its own work and that of the Churches abroad. One of these news sheets contains the text of a speech made by Dr. Gerstenmaier in June to the German Committee on Christian Reconstruction. In it he lays strong emphasis on his conviction that the Church is called not only to preach the word, but to demonstrate the

word by service. "In a world confused and misled by words, the credibility of the Christian word in the deepest possible sense lies in its translation into act. The Christian word without Christian *being* contains no promise." Conditions in Germany to-day are such that the Church cannot delegate its responsibility for the ministry of service to organizations outside itself or in loose association with it. The Church itself must perform this ministry of service. "If it does", he continues, "the Church has committed itself to a new reformation", because if their aim is fulfilled of making the service rendered by Church aid not only a matter of special individuals or special institutions but a part of the life of every congregation, then thousands of people who are not clerics or theologians will be playing a part of central importance in the ministry of the Church. They will, he hopes, help to deliver the Church from the over-intellectualism, phrase-making and fruitless discussion which have so often made its message unintelligible and incredible.

ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND

There has just been republished in the Penguin books a series of essays by J. W. Robertson Scott, whose services to the English countryside (i.e. to the people who live in it rather than to those who look at it) through his editorship of *The Countryman* and through the other writings of a long life, have earned him a finely deserved honour. He has added three new chapters, in which he reviews the remarkable progress made in some of the causes for which he has fought during the last quarter of a century. On every hand new life has come to the villages—better housing, higher wages, better hours, greater security, a widening of outlook brought by wireless, by the 300,000 women in Women's Institutes, by improvements in rural education, by country buses, by county libraries, by the steady inflow of country men and women to parish and county councils, and in a hundred other ways. While in twenty-five years men and women have been working to get a better life in the countryside, the Church has been slowly and steadily losing ground. "But," says he, "*the question of what*

masters and men are living for remains (the italics are his, not mine). . . . The basic question for the rural reformer who is prepared to go to the roots of the problems that confront him, is the extent to which Church and Chapel may be counted upon in the solution of them."

The editor would like to thank those who by writing News-Letters have enabled her to take a carefree holiday. Most of this was spent in a part of England rarely chosen by railway companies for their seductive posters, but productive in times past of some of England's greatest landscape painters. Every piece of rising ground in this part of the world yields a gentle view of fields and woods, and on every hand the scene is made more lovely by the grace and dignity of church spires and towers. The visitors' books in these country churches showed us that we were by no means the only ones who enjoyed their treasures. Yet only on one or two occasions did I say as I came out of a church, "this building is the home of a living congregation of people". The atmosphere of most of them was the atmosphere of a museum—cold, clean, but unloved. The feeling of drifting towards an inevitable crisis was strong.

THE SUPPLEMENT

Miss M. L. Harford was a member of the Curtis Committee, of whose important Report she writes in this Supplement. As such she visited many of the institutions caring for homeless children, bringing to the work a long experience as a social worker. Miss Harford was secretary of the Sheffield Council of Social Service from 1927-1935, and warden of the Lady Margaret Hall Settlement in Lambeth until her appointment in 1939 to her present post of chief woman officer of the National Council of Social Service. The News-Letter has constantly benefited from Miss Harford's experience and willing help.

Kathleen Bliss

THE CHILD DEPRIVED OF ORDINARY HOME LIFE

By M. L. HARFORD

DURING the years since the Christian News-Letter was first published, there have been few Government Reports of any importance to which it has not drawn attention by editorial comment or by special Supplements.

Not all of these, however, have aroused such widespread and sustained public interest as the Report of the Care of Children Committee, commonly known as the Curtis Report.¹ Yet only a fraction of those who read the original summaries of the Report in the press have probably managed to read the actual Report even though it has been in its way a "best seller" amongst White Papers with its circulation of 33,000 copies.

What in the Report needs to be presented to Christian men and women everywhere as matter for their special concern?

PRINCIPLES AND MEANS OF REFORM

The Report is the work of a Committee set up by three Ministers of the Coalition Government. It has been accepted by the existing Government and the first steps towards the implementation of its recommendations taken. These have been the appointment of the Home Office (with an extended Children's Branch) as the single Ministry for the care of these children and the decision that consequent to legislation local authorities shall set up Children's Committees and employ a qualified Children's Officer. This action has relieved the fear of many that the recommendations of the Report would suffer the fate of similar recommendations made in the Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law of 1909 on which no official action was ever taken. Yet although the Home Secretary, speaking recently at the Annual Meeting of a Children's Society, stated that it was hoped in time to carry out all the recommendations of the Report, unless the underlying principles and the extent of the reforms

¹ Published September, 1946. H.M.S.O. Price 3s.

required are fully understood and supported by public opinion, how easily may performance fail! It is not necessarily easy however for the ordinary citizen to see what he can do to help in remedying the defects in the present system—or lack of system—to which the Report draws attention.

What are those principles to which the body of experienced opinion in this country (as shown by the evidence on which the Curtis Committee based many of their recommendations) attach such weight?

First of all, the need to regard each child “... as an individual with his own rights and possessions, his own life to live and his own contribution to offer...” (Para. 418 of Report). This may seem a complete platitude in a country where allegiance is publicly given to democratic, if not to Christian values in regard to the importance of the individual. Yet in many Homes, despite good physical care, the Committee found that the child was “merely one of a large crowd, eating, sleeping and playing with the rest without any place or possession of his own or any quiet room to which he could retreat. Still more important, he was without the feeling that there was anyone to whom he could turn who was vitally interested in his welfare, or who cared for him as a person”.

Of course, the Committee found other Homes both under Local Authorities and voluntary bodies where each child was loved and cared for as an individual, but there were too many of the other type—in all parts of the country.

Secondly, the need of the child not only for individual treatment and personal affection, but for the *stability* of a home where as the Report says “he can expect to remain with those who will continue to care for him till he goes out into the world on his own feet”. Among distressing features of the present state of affairs are the frequently haphazard placing of children in Homes and the number of moves a child may undergo once his own home is left behind. While the best of the local authorities and voluntary organizations have instituted reception Homes, where each child can be studied and time taken to find him the type of home care most suited to his needs—if possible in company with any other members of his own family—far more often the child goes

wherever a vacancy occurs and where he may often be a misfit, or suffer a bewildering wait in a workhouse in conditions in no way likely to contribute to his sense of security. Even where the child becomes homeless in infancy lack of continuity in care may still be his lot, for frequently it happens that a child spends the time up to two in the Public Assistance nursery ; then moves to a 'Toddlers' Home, to move again at five to a mixed Cottage and at seven to go to a Home for Boys (or Girls). The equipment and personal care in each of these Homes may be and often is excellent, but the sense of "belonging" so vital to the security of a child, must be more often than not entirely absent. This system is based partly on administrative convenience, partly on the desire for economy.

LOCAL PUBLIC OPINION AND THE IMPLEMENTING OF THE REPORT

With these principles in mind the first duty of members of Churches everywhere is surely to make it their business to find out the nature of the voluntary and public provision for homeless children in their own neighbourhood, and then, where needed, to use their influence in every possible way to see that the recommendations of the Report are implemented. This will mean using another more costly scale of values than that of administrative convenience and economy, for in the long run, it is likely to involve either increased voluntary subscriptions or increased rates if we are to reproduce for these children, as far as we can, the conditions of affection and stability found in the ordinary family.

The question of Committees also provides plenty of scope for a fresh approach. Probably before the necessary legislation is passed Councillors in many parts of the country will be considering the composition of the new Children's Committee and possibly a sub-committee on boarding out or for the management of their Children's Homes. Are they going to adopt the Report's suggestions and see that both men and women are asked to serve on such a sub-committee, that co-option of qualified people should be arranged and that the opportunity should be considered of bringing in younger people whose own family responsibilities may prevent their standing for election as a

Councillor, but who could give the time to a single committee? Or are they, as in one case recently heard of, merely deciding on the unadventurous step of re-appointing the existing children's sub-committee of the Public Assistance Committee with its preponderance of older people?

The question of age is not irrelevant since members of either voluntary or statutory bodies responsible for Children's Homes are apt to judge the need for amenities by the standards of their youth, forgetting that children brought up to sit on bare wooden benches and drink out of chipped enamel mugs are living a life far removed from the standard of most weekly wage earners of to-day, and will be seriously at a loss when they take their place in the world outside the Home. One is tempted to suggest that some of the octogenarians, not to say nonagenarians, on management committees might see their way to becoming "sitters in" and so enable suitable fathers and mothers of young families, whose day to day experience with their own children would be of special value in such work, to take their place on the committees of Children's Homes.

But apart from supporting general measures of reform recommended by the Curtis Committee there are other directions in which the help of the Churches is specially needed. The best equipment and accommodation, the best rules and regulations will break down unless the right staff can be found to follow this calling of caring for other people's children. How far are parents, teachers and pastors, who have the first opportunity of suggesting careers to young people, putting this vocation before them? One obstacle in the past has been the lack of any nationally recognized training scheme. The National Association of Administrators of Local Government Establishments in their evidence to the Curtis Committee drew special attention to the need for nationally recognized qualifications for officers. It was noted by members of the Committee that there was no sense of belonging to a profession amongst the staffs of Children's Homes, who were often found living arduous lives with poor conditions of pay and service and without the support of recognition by the community of the responsible and devoted nature of their work. It is, therefore, of great importance that the suggestions made in

the Interim Report on Training in Child Care¹ should be carefully studied ; for in this field, too, it is local initiative which is needed to increase the existing means of training. Despite present difficulties, cannot Domestic Science Schools and Colleges, Polytechnics and similar institutions explore the possibility of starting training schemes in homecraft on the lines of the Report's recommendations ? Such previous thinking will greatly help the Central Council of Training, now set up by the Home Office, in its urgent task.

Apart from the help which Christian people can give in establishing the conception of the Care of Children in Homes as a real vocation, and in pressing for training schemes, there is an urgent need for organizers of religious education to consider how they can play their specific part in the training of the staff of Children's Homes. As part of this training the Interim Report states in its list of subjects : " A course in religious education should be available, if desired, arranged, if possible, by agreement with the religious denominations." When institutions mentioned above, local authorities or voluntary bodies in different parts of the country start these courses of training (and some are due to do so this autumn) in how many towns or cities would a course in religious education be possible, either arranged by a single denomination or by a group of denominations such as is found in a local Council of Christian Churches ? Readers of the Christian News-Letter will be convinced of the vital importance that those who have the direct care of these children should know how to guide their first approach to religion, yet unless plans are made now for such courses and suitable tutors recruited a great opportunity will be missed.

It is, however, not only the future staff of Children's Homes who need guidance and help in this part of their task of caring for children, the existing staff would often welcome the fellowship and help of experienced people in meeting the religious needs of the children. How to give reality to grace before meals, or family prayers, how to help the children with their own prayers, how to answer the questions which arise in developing minds, by some of whom the name of God was first heard only in profanity,

¹ Cmd. 6760. H.M.S.O., March, 1946. Price 3d.

this is all part of the task of the house-mother or matron—a task often performed in isolation. The fact that the children are sent to Church and Sunday School does not necessarily mean that they become a real part of a worshipping community, or that they and those who care for them are welcomed into the homes of fellow church members. This is another great need of many Children's Homes—a much closer link with the local neighbourhood. The contrast is strong between those Homes where children and staff alike are taken to the hearts of the local people, where Church and Chapel seek out ways of making life happier and richer for individual children or members of staff and those others which may be typified by the remark made in one Home: "We never see the clergy unless they come to make a complaint". There is now a growing desire on the part of many people to befriend children in Homes who have no relatives or friends, to have them for holidays and to take them out, and various "godmother" or "uncle and aunt" schemes are being tried. But it is likely that the offering of friendship and friendliness to the *staff* may be the most direct way to find out how best service can be given. It is at the end of an afternoon's rest in a deck chair in someone else's garden, or over a cup of tea after an evening spent at a concert or cinema, that a tired member of staff will find confidence to tell where the shoe pinches and how help will be welcome. It was found in one Home for thirty boys that the only assistance given to the master and matron was the evening visit of the local Vicar who stayed with the boys while the couple went out. But is this not a ministry which might be exercised by lay members of congregations too?

BOARDING OUT

There is another group beside the staff of Children's Homes who need the friendly interest and respectful help of their neighbours. Those men and women who take "deprived" children into their own homes and act as foster parents to them, also need recognition and sympathy in their service. For it is a very real form of service to the community to take unwanted children into your own home, more especially when, as may happen with the children committed to the care of the local authorities as in need of "care and protection", they exhibit behaviour problems call-

ing for much wisdom and patience in their correction and cure. Only those who know village life will appreciate too the searchlight turned on foster parents and the lingering suspicion that they are making something out of the children as too often happened in former years. That the reverse is now the truth is perhaps one of the reasons for the dearth of foster parents in many areas. Yet the Committee found that in the majority of families they visited to observe boarding out methods, the children enjoyed a good standard of physical care and just that atmosphere of individual affection and ordinary everyday contacts with neighbours which approximated most closely to the freedom of life at home with good parents. Here again is a field of endeavour for members of the Churches. Too often is the possibility of taking a foster child (or its adoption) regarded from the point of view only of the intending perhaps childless parents, or of those who want to fill the void left by the loss of their own child, or to provide a companion for an only child. Is there not an imperative need to think "Here is a child in danger of lacking something all its life, which we perhaps can give" and then accepting the disabilities and risks which are found in caring for any children, your own or someone else's?

This is not to say that there are not risks which may not be avoided by careful previous inquiry and "matching" of children and foster parents, or minimized by the advice and support given by qualified visitors such as the Report recommends. Volunteers will still be needed as members of local committees or unofficial friends to foster parents and children alike; but the day has gone by when the visiting of these children can be left entirely to the kindly but sometimes intermittent observation of local visitors, or its well-being ultimately depend on the distant supervision of the clerical staff of a local authority. The Committee in fact felt bound to state: "What impressed us with regard to boarding out was the need for a greater sense of personal interest and responsibility at local authority headquarters, and for more specialist staff there: and for more trained supervisors to visit the children. There is no doubt that the O'Neill case had put authorities on their guard against slackness in administration; and we thought that the individuals in charge of boarding out in

the authorities' offices were doing their best, though sometimes in a rather remote and impersonal way, to serve the interests of the children. But the present administrative system seems to us full of pitfalls. Divided responsibility, office delays, misunderstandings and misjudgments of people, irregular visiting and failure to visit promptly in emergency, may easily under present conditions facilitate a tragedy, as they have done in the past." Adoption of the Committee's recommendations particularly in the appointment of the qualified Children's Officer with her trained staff of boarding out visitors, carefully selected for their understanding of children's problems, will, it is hoped, in time do much to remedy the defects of the present system. But these workers will need much local support and co-operation in their manifold tasks if they are to win success. Since one of these duties will be to board out children with people of their own denomination where possible, it may be hoped that they will turn with confidence to the local clergy and congregations for help in placing the children. Those of the Curtis Committee who signed a reservation on religious care of boarded out children suggested that consultation should take place with persons representative of the denomination concerned where no home appeared available of the same denomination. They believed that unless trouble were taken in this respect, in practice the child might often receive little or no religious care. The admirable memorandum on *Boarding Out* issued jointly by the Ministry of Health and the Home Office¹ in connection with the new Boarding Out Rules—after the publication of the Curtis Report, does not specifically mention such local consultation. If, however, the Boarding Out Visitor has already found the Churches and their leaders her constant allies in matters concerning the children, consultation on this vitally important question will naturally follow.

AFTER CARE

Perhaps even more is the help of Christian people needed when it comes to the moment when the boy or girl leaves the Home to start work in another neighbourhood. This kind of care needs to be unobtrusive, for no boy or girl wants to be marked out from his or her fellows. It is rather part of the friendship that

¹ 34-313. H.M.S.O., 1946. Price 4d.

needs extending to each "stranger within our gates", whether it be the young nurse at the local hospital, the young man joining a new branch of his firm, or the teacher from another town. All of them may suffer acute loneliness and the boy or girl from a Home—under present conditions—will also suffer too often from the lack of letters from anyone who cares. Local authorities sometimes set up hostels for working boys or grant aid voluntary bodies who run such hostels. But hostels were seen sorely lacking in the ordinary amenities found in most industrial workers' homes, and although situated in the centre of towns, appeared to be quite unknown to the majority of their fellow citizens. Some Voluntary Homes are endeavouring to run clubs attached to hostels for girls. It is distressing however to find house agents in a residential neighbourhood refusing to lease houses for such purposes on the ground that they "will bring the neighbourhood down".

CONCLUSION

What is the conclusion of this whole matter to each of us as Christians? Is it not that the child, orphaned or illegitimate, from the broken home or the bad home, must not be handed over to some "body" to care for and then either forgotten or thought of only as one of a labelled group for whom we have but a distant responsibility? Must we not rather bear these children always in our hearts as human beings with a personal claim on us, for whom we must see that they have what is essential to their growth and not least that happiness which is the right of all children?

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